The poets, Thomas Hardy and Robert Lee Frost were at the centre of the intellectual ferment of the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Janus-faced period of transition was one of weak convictions, paralysed intellects and growing laxity of principles. But there were also new sparks which heralded a new faith and a new artistry. The post-romantic writers like Swinburne, Hardy, Mill and Frost could in Mathew Arnold's phrase occupy "a pause in which the turn to a new mode of spiritual progress is being accomplished."  

Transitional years' chaotic condition shaped a pessimistic frame of mind and made the view of nature gloomy and bleak. Nineteenth century science uprooted smug faith in a divinely ordained universe of harmony and order. Hardy and Frost are bewildered by man's isolation and nature's remoteness. They acknowledge the existence of an indifferent nature. The design of things is seen as dark, terrifying and tragic. The turn of the century was an age which has witnessed the displacement of the deistic worship of nature seen earlier in Whitman and Wordsworth.
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The deistic concept of a divinely ordained nature is abandoned. Nature is seen to be divorced from God. God or the Prime Mover is shown to be unconcerned with the lot of the earth. He feigns oblivion when taken to task. In "God Forgotten" God says

- 'The Earth, sayest thou? The Human race?
By Me created? Sad its lot?
Methought I have no remembrance of such place:
Such world I fashioned not' II 5-8

In "Doom and She", Nature and God are personified as 'a mighty pair, slow, statusque, intense amid vague Immense'. Nature turns to her Lord with an inquiry as to the condition of the Earth and its inmates. God confesses that he 'had schemed a world of strife' working by touch alone. Petulantly he tries to end the futile considerations:

'World-weaver!' he replies,
I scan all thy domain;
But since nor joy nor pain
It lies in me to recognize,
Thy questionings are vain. ("Doom and She"
II 26-30 CPH, pp. 118-120)

God is shown in another poem as vexed at his wasted efforts. The divine sanctioner says regretfully,

'That I made Earth, and life and man/ It still repenteth me!' ("By the Earth's Corpse", CPH, pp. 126-7)
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Frost's concept is also remote from the pantheistic view. In "New Hampshire" he says, 'Even to say the groves were God's first temples/Comes too near to Ahas's sin for safety'.

The Masques reveal Nature's lack of superhuman perfection. The Universe is indifferent. God, if he exists, is weak. In a Masque of Reason, Frost lets God answer Job's wife as to 'who invented earth'?

Any originality it showed
was of the Devil. He invented Hell,
False premises that are the original
Of all originality, the sin
That felled the angels, Wolsey should have said
As for earth, we groped that out together,

11 202 - 7, PRF, pp. 480 - 81.

The old ways of taking a pagan inspiration from nature are no longer sufficient. 'Pan' or the 'Wood God' in "Pan with us" (PRF, p. 23) comes shabbily attired, a sad person without any pomp.

From the romantic trinity of God, nature and man, God is left out of the cosmic scheme. Only Nature, indifferent to all moral values, impelling all things, to a life of suffering and death is recognised. Huxley and other scientists could not associate a supernatural intervention in the vast evolution of things. Frost conveniently leaves
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out the question of a deeper power responsible and friendly to man in "To Earthward" (PRF, p. 226) and "A Drumlin Woodchuck" (PRF, p. 281).

The modern concept is science based and one of mechanical determinism. The universe is viewed as fixed, dead, and spiritless. In the cosmic scheme the ultimate power is irreducible brute matter, spread in arbitrary configuration. Such matter is itself senseless or as Hardy calls it "Great Foresightless." The idea of an impersonal, indifferent and insentient Nature was expounded by Lucretius in his De Rerum Nature. Hardy fails to see any benevolence in the unity of things. The mindless mechanical process brings chaos, suffering, disease and imperfection. The impulses are at odds with a blind determinism. The joys and sorrows resulting from its blind gropings are nothing to it. In Hardy's perception there is neither good nor purpose in the universe; it just goes on and on in a sublime routine. THE CHORUS OF THE YEARS in The Dynasts calls it a 'rapt determinator' that neither good nor evil knows. (The Dynasts, II, VI,7, p.437). Hardy's works bear evidence to his conviction that
3. Concept

'...the cease of things is neither moral, nor immoral, but unmoral.' In "Hap" Hardy portrays Nature as an embodiment of neutral unconcern.

-Crass casualty obstructs the sun and rain, And dicing time for gladness casts a mean... These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown Blissess about my pilgrimage as pain. "Hap" 11 11-14

(CPH, P.9)

Natures' creation writhe in agony of fearful unfulfilments ("The Lacking Sense", CPH, pp. 116-18).

Life in general is of thwarted purposing, a routine, mechanical cycle of birth, growth, maturity and death.

...Life would signify
A thwarted purposing;
That we come to live and are called to die.
("Yll 'ham-Wood's Story" 11 8 - 10, CPH, P.298)

Hardy is weary of life which can tell only of "Death, Time Destiny -" ("To Life", CPH, p. 118) such cheerless visions originate from nescience and helplessness messa of the victims. The ephemeral lives are set firmly in the larger rhythms of nature. The whole of sentient life is transitory as against the vast timeless context of the insentient universe. ("Life and Death", CPH, pp. 730 - 31).
Frost finds nature hostile. The design of things appears sinister to him. Frost said in a letter to Lincoln Macveagh, "Something hates us and likes to spoil our fair beginning." Frost is inclined to view nature as a mighty force actively hindering man's journey. This immense, impersonal dynamic force is wild, annihilating terrifying and terrifying universe.

The deep rooted terror of a malevolent nature is seen in "Storm Fear". Against the fury of the immeasurable strength of natural forces, human efforts to resist seem to be puny and ineffective.

> When the wind works against us in the dark,  
> And pelts with snow  
> The lower-chamber window on the east,  
> And whispers with a sort of stiffled bark,  
> The beast" ("Storm Fear" 11 1-5 PEP, 9 - 10)

The force of nature and its violence are again emphasized in "Once By the Pacific". The towering waves and their shattered water represents kinetic energy. The poet warns the meek 'to be prepared for rage' as
"It looked as if a night of dark intent was coming, and not only a night, an age." (PRF, p. 250)

To Hardy nature on the otherhand is 'Unmaliced and unimpassioned' (The Dynasts, II, VI, 5, p. 414): In his passive perception, pain is an inherent element.

In a letter to John Stuart Mill, Hardy echoes part of Mill's conviction that, 'If the maker of the world can all that He will, He wills misery and there is no escape from the conclusion.'

'Pain has been, and pain is, no new sort of morals in Nature can remove pain from the past and make it pleasure for those who are its infallible estimators, the bearers thereof. And no injustice however slight, can be atoned for by her future generosity, however ample, so long as we consider Nature to be, or to stand for unlimited power. The exoneration of an Omnipotent Mother by her retrospective justice becomes an absurdity when we ask what made the foregone injustice necessary to her Omnipotence?'

Nature unintentionally kresses her creations and spreads ruin and suffering "The Bedridden Peasant" is an earnest appeal to Nature:

., seeing how much Thy creatures bear -
Lame, starved, or maimed, or blind -
Wouldst heal the ills with quickest care (11 25-27)

(CPR, pp. 124-25)
In "Hap" (CPH, p.9) the Prime Force confesses to the suffering Subalterns, 'thy sorrow is my ecstasy'. It unblooms hope, slays joy. 'Life' (as Hardy knows) is an unfenced flower, benumbed and nipped at unawares, and at its best but brief (CPH, p. 329-30). In his poems 'blinded birds grope in eternal dark', enjail'd in pitiless wire (The Blinded Birds CPH, p.446), sheep and the shepherded are herded as one sodden mass in autumnal torrential rain ("A Sheep Fair" CPH, pp.731-2) and lovers suffer with a grim bitterness ('Neutral Tones'' CPH, p. 12).

And laughers fail, and greetings die:
Hope dwindles; yea,
Faiths waste away,
Affections and enthusiasms numb,

"To An Unborn'Famper Child"
11 8 - 11

(CPH, pp. 127 - 28)

The terror and pain in nature are the consequences of the gropings of a blind power. Nature, 'has laboured long as one held in trance by vacant rote' ("Sleep-Worker" CPH, 121 - 2). Nature is seen
'Busy in her handsome house
Known as Space, she falls-a-drowse;
Yet, in seeming, works on dreaming,
While beneath her groping hands
Fiends make havoc in her bends'.

("The Bullfinches" 11 16-21, CPH, pp. 122-23.)

Nature is a blind mother, bringing, 'unfulfilments,
red ravages' among her own creations who groan in pain. Probably, Hardy feels 'the sightless orbs of hers' which 'bar to her omniscience', ("The Lacking Sense" CPH, pp. 116 - 118) as responsible for her callousness. The epithet 'blind' is frequently used by Hardy to describe Nature. 11

Similar visionless power stands mute in Frost's "Stars". A wanderer is completely lost on a wintry night with chilly winds, blowing and white snow covering and obliterating everything.

And yet with neither love nor hate
Those stars like some show-white
Minerva's snow-white marble eyes
Without the gift of sight.

("Stars" 11 9-12, PFR, p. 9).

Frost finds a total void in the white blank snow in "Desert Places" (PFR, p. 296). 'A blind whiteness of benighted snow/with no expression nothing to express.' It is the nothingness of a dead universe.

Human despair increases with an awareness of cosmic
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meaninglessness. The poems "Design" (BHF, pp. 302) and "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep" (FRF, pp. 501) also feature an absolute blankness, devoid of purpose or meaning.

The unconscious, insentient nature is indifferent to the sufferings of her minions. It is impersonal, and "empty of feeling. The inorganic process is not responsive. Nature is a ceaseless drifting power. It is relentless and unconcerned. The fatal energy of existence annihilates the meek, protesting subjects. Personal desires are swept away in an indifferent universe. The Doomsters heap travails and teems around us" ("To an Unborn Jasper Child" CPH, p. 127-8). A Church-builder, after suffering untold miseries in realizing his life's ambition of building a church finds his "gift to God Futile" and realizes,

The world moves as erstwhile;
And powerful Wrong on feeble Right
Tramples in olden style.

("The Church-Builder" IL 51-53
CPH, pp. 170-72)

Frostian man lets out a pitiable plea for
Counter love from nature. In answer, a single deer,
neither friendly nor passive, but aloof and brutal appears, pushing aside everything in its path. The animal lands like a 'waterfall'. In the choice of words like 'a great buck' with horny tread, Frost indicates an alien force, mighty, yet unresponsive. The syntax projects a tremendous, unfeeling inhuman power, totally different from the meek timid cry of a man.

As a great buck it powerfully appeared,
Pushing the crumpled water up ahead,
And landed pouring like a waterfall,
And stumbled through the rocks with horny tread,
And forced the underbrush - and that was all”.

("The Most of It" 11 16-20PFB. p. 166).

The continents of moil and misery (GPH. p. 116) seen everywhere compels Hardy to trace the cosmic design and assign responsibility to 'The blind power'. But he finds a schemeless ambience, a purposeless artistry. It is a blind volition, an impelling process which moves by incognizance, 'Nature' herself has emerged from 'Impercipience' by a listless sequence. She is as Hardy finds,

One, far above forethinking; processive,
Rapt, superconscious; a clairvoyancy
That knows not what it knows, yet works therewith.

("The Dynasts", I, V, 6, p. 147).
The first cause or nature is without any moral sense. It is a purposeless 'Clairvoyancy'. Man in his pride and beauty is a mere puppet in the hands of nature. He is a prey to her plundering instincts.

In Hardy's lyrics we see a renunciation of old visions of cosmic harmony and painless existence. Nature is an irreverent force, purposeless in its scheme and 'designless' in its making, chaotic and mindless in its artistry. The universe is 'taciturn and dreary' (CPH, pp. 9 - 10) and 'naturings Nature's passioned plans were for bloom and beauty marred'. The result is 'thwarting of all her noble purposes'.

where she would mint a perfect mould, an ill;
where she would don divinest hues, a stain,
Over her purposed genial hour a chill,
Upon her charm of flawless flesh a blain:

("Discouragement" 11 5-8, CPH, p. 829).

Nature is a blind automaton, a God's head; or a 'Vast Imbecility' or 'a dying Godhead' (CPH, 66 - 67). Hardy's moral feeling is outraged by the indifference of nature to its creation's sufferings. In the mechanically motivated, schemeless cosmic power, there is only suffering and neglect. Even the vegetable world
("In A wood" CPH, p. 64) is a battle ground of infighting and mutual destruction. Nature is a meaningless cycle without rationality or sense of beauty or moral ethics. Hardy's hopelessness is expressed in his letter to Florence Henniker in 1893.

"The sightless tyrants of our fall which beautifully expresses one's consciousness of blind circumstances beating upon, without any feeling for or against". 14

In the absence of proper design, the universe becomes a 'chance-ridden' process where circumstance is a link in the chain of events. Nature is unconscious. Therefore, there is absolute superiority of will over intelligence. It is an autonomous process. Hence it is to be inferred that the universe is ruled by the immutable laws of necessity, determinism and chance. The capriciousness that Hardy perceives in the cosmic unity makes him describe it in such self explanatory terms as "Hap", 'chance', 'circumstance', 'dicing Time' (CPH, p.9).

The tragic theme of cosmic impiety and the nemesis that overtakes it is portrayed in "The Convergence of the Twain". A splendid ship and a mute iceberg meet and leave a trail of devastation.
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Till the Spinner of the Years
and 'Now'! And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

("The Convergence of the Twain" ll 31-33, CP. p. 266-7).

Frost, on the contrary perceives evidence of
a design in the cosmic scheme. The sequences in the
poem "Spring-Pools" (PR. p. 245) are indicative of
a pattern. The pools appear out of the melted snow.
Periodically they disappear with the onset of summer.
The rhythmic pattern goes on undisturbed 'Like the
flowers beside them chill and shiver/Will like the
flowers beside them would soon be gone'. When the
unerring routine is applied in "Design" however,
it is wrought with metaphysical horror. The
implications are sinister. In a series of questions
the poet wonders at the causes and effect of a
scheme. In the choice meeting of a white-heal-all
(which is normally blue) a moth and an albino
spider the poet finds 'a design of darkness'.

What brought the kindred spider to that height,
Then steered the white moth thither in the night?
What but design of darkness of appall?
If design govern in a thing so small.

("Design" ll 11-14, PR. p. 302).
Hardy's scepticism reckons the general tragic fatality of existence. Everything moves on involuntarily towards an inevitable end. The tragedies are wound around universal unalterable movement and a sightless nature. Nature is but one of the terms Hardy uses to signify the primal force. ('Fate', 'Cress Casualty', 'Lay-shape', (The Dynasts I, i, 6, p. 62) and finally he calls 'The Immanent Will'.) In "Convergence of the Twain-"
'The Immanent will that stirs and urges everything'
(CPH, 306 - 7) The will has no moral sense and is unaware of humanity's pain. He finds the ruin of human and animal lives in a futile struggle against the Universe. Life was a bliss before the birth of consciousness. 'Sickness and loss' were unknown, and so were 'regret' 'starved hope or heart burnings'. Everything was gratefully accepted as a gift from the Prime Mover.
'But the disease of feeling germed/ And primal rightness took the tinct of wrongs' ("Before Life and After" CPH, p. 277). The poem "Aerolite" signifies a germ of consciousness which once came to the world, probably from some wandering heavenly body and it took root. The consequence was to make humanity conscious of 'stains and stingings'.
And operated to unblind  
Earth's old-established ignorance  
Of stains and stinging,  
Which grin no griefs while not opined,  


But the birth of the very consciousness opens  
a different vista. Even nature is uneasy concerning  
the newly awakened human consciousness. Man is no  
longer deceived by a blind faith in Nature's deft  
achievement. Nature calls it 'ill-timed and insane'.  
She considers nature's teaching as 'gross and ignoble'.  
She seems to regret human cognizance when she says,

'My purpose went not to develop  
Such insight in Earthland;  
Such potent appraisements affront me,  
And sadder my reign!'

"The Mother Mourns" 11 29-32  
(CPH, pp. 111-113)

In the immanent scheme which Hardy perceives, 'human  
will is part of the general will', (CPH, p. 510).  
If a part becomes conscious, slowly it can awaken the  
rest of the scheme into an awareness of pain and  
suffering. In his letter to Edward Wright, Hardy says,
That the unconscious will of the universe is growing aware of Itslef, I believe, I may claim as my own idea solely - at which I arrived by reflecting that what has already taken place in a fraction of the whole (i.e. so much of the world as has become conscious) is likely to take place in the mass; and there being no will outside the mass - i.e. the Universe of the, whole will becomes conscious thereby and ultimately, it is to be hoped, sympathetic. 17

Thus the age-old wrongs could be righted, the grievances of the past cancelled. Deliverance from misery could be hopefully sought. 'Conciousness, the Will Informing till It fashion all things fair!'
(The Dynasts, Afterscene p. 707.)

Hardy as also Frost are confronted with a natural scheme of things which is not apparently responsive to human pleas and cries. It is not easy to penetrate the barriers and probe the mystery of nature. It is ever an incomprehensible and unknowable force. But the poets get an occasional vision. While Hardy tries to find the reason behind the Prime cause's blindness, Frost is set on finding a solution. Unlike Hardy, Frost sees a duality in nature, which is nature is wild yet beneficent, terrifying, yet communicative. If nature at one moment, seems hostile and malevolent
(as in "Storm Fear") (PRF, p. 9 - 10) it is also responsive as in "To the Thawing Wind". Frost turns hopefully to the "Southwester" to herald spring.

Come with rain, O loud Southwester!
Bring the singer, bring the nester;
Give the buried flower a dream,
Make the settled snowbank steam;

"To the Thawing Wind" 11 4
(PR, pp. 11 - 12)

The theme of nature's dualism runs throughout the poetry of Frost - Nature appears unconscious, or benevolent depending on the viewer's point of view. Creation's destiny is woven with joy and pain, love and weariness, justice and fault. But the communion with nature is not adorned with mystical significance. He respects the boundaries and accepts the barriers separating man from nature. The design of darkness may govern the universe. But Frost finds an order in natural anarchy. Life is not easily denied. Nature will not submit to winter death. The winter's snow may blot out everything. "But the settled banks steam. The leaves burst into bloom. Out of the frozen lake ten million lizards crawl out" (PRF, p. 237-8). He says again,
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......: the snow may heap
In long storms an undrifted four feet deep
As measured against maple, birch, and oak,
It cannot check the peeper's silver croak;
And I shall see the snow all go downhill
In water of a slender April rill".

("The Onset" ll. 14-19)
(PFY, p. 226)

Frost finds generally the natural world to be
impersonal and unfeeling, unable to express kinship
and willing to return love. He transforms an old
static concept of design into an active pulsating
dynamic concept. Reginald Cook’s remark could really
sum up Frost’s attitude, “He accepts Hardy’s hostile
universe no more readily than Emerson’s benevolent
one”.

Thus the poets deny the benevolence of nature,
conceived as the unity of things personified or as a
divinely sanctioned Cosmic scheme. The various
emotional responses to the sense of isolation, alienation
and nostalgia together form their concept of nature.
Their expression tries to match the mood in describing
the science based cosmic unity of things. The tone
suits the varying moods of disputes, discontents, fears,
certitudes and mild hopes. The haunting note of alienation and the subdued note of acceptance give rise to a new artistry.

2. "God Forgotten" ll 5-8.
   Since I will be referring to this primary source frequently subsequent references are worked within the text, marked as CPH with the page number given.

3. "New Hampshire" ll 392 - 3
   Since this is another primary source frequently cited, further references are within the text marked as PRF with page number indicated.

   Further references to this work will be within the text with the part, act, scene and page number indicated.


   Further reference to the work are indicated as Life.

7. See poems such as "Hap" (CPH, p. 9) "Mother Mourns" (CPH, p. 111 - 12) also reflect the mechanical perspective of nature.


11. "In Doom and She" (CPH, p. 118 - 120) it is
"unlit with sight is she", in "To Outer Nature",
(CPH, p. 61) "darkness overtakes" and in "Sleep
worker" (CPH, 121-22) Nature is "in a trance".

Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Vol. II, ed. Neville Rogers,

13. J.O. Bailey rightly points out that "Nature, so far
as it is unconscious does not know the distinction of
moral or immoral - "
J. C. Bailey, T. Hardy and Cosmic Mind
A New Reading of the Dynasts
(Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press,

14. Ed. F. B. Pinion, and Evelyn Hardy, One Barre Fair
Woman, T. Hardy's Letters to Florence Hemmiker
Again in a letter written in 1901 (which he did not
send) Hardy writes, "My own interest lies largely
in non-rationalistic subjects, since non-rationality
seems so far as one can perceive, to be the principal
principle of the Universe" Florence Emily Hardy, The Letters
Years of T. Hardy (London, 1930), p. 90.

15. Reginald L. Cook stretches the meaning a little
further by implication and suggests a vast cosmic
scheme including everything. He says, "Frost's
conjectural inquiry in "Design" not only implies
a subtle but a malefic force at work. And if it is
the ruck of little things - then by extension it
must also operate generally in the human sphere of
activity since man cannot be separated from the
complex interrelated destiny of the natural universe."

Reginald L. Cook, The Dimensions of R. Frost
16. Ernest Brennecke and Stevenson have traced the evolution of thought and found Schopenhauer's influence over Hardy's choice of will.

Brennecke, Jr., Ernest, *Thomas Hardy's Universe* (Boston, 1924).

Hardy himself makes an oblique reference in "The Pedestrian" (CPH, pp. 502 - 3).

A student was I, of Schopenhauer,
Kant, Hegel ...........

But it is more likely that he was influenced by Von Hartmann's philosophy of the unconscious. He describes the Immanent will in *The Dynasts* "a rapt Determinator that neither good nor evil knows (II, VI, 7, p. 437). This statement is consistent with Von Hartmann's statement that, "Nature so far as it is Unconscious does not know the distinction of moral and immoral. Yet nature is in itself not good or bad, but is ever nothing else but natural i.e., self adequate."

(Von Hartmann, I, p. 267).

17. *Life*, p. 335. In a letter to Dr. Caleb Salesby Hardy says,

"I think the view of the unconscious force as gradually becoming conscious i.e. that consciousness is creeping further and further back towards the origin of the force, had never (as far as I know) been advanced before *The Dynasts appeared*" *Ibid.* 335.